

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

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HINCHEY FIGHTS FOR FARMERS' MARKET PROGRAMS

ITHACA - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) today expressed his strong opposition to the Bush Administration's plan to eliminate farmer's market programs that have greatly benefited farmers, senior citizens and low-income families in New York. Hinchey made his remarks while visiting the Ithaca Farmers' Market.

"It's inconceivable to me that the Department of Agriculture would eliminate these nutrition programs," said Hinchey. "These programs give people who are struggling to make ends meet access to fresh, nutritious food. They have been a tremendous success for farmers and for those who are given the means with which to buy their products, particularly in New York."

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides low-income women, infants and children with vouchers to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets during the local growing season. The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provides the same service for low-income individuals who are at least 60 years old.

Eight hundred New York farmers and 239 farmers' markets in the state were certified under these programs in 2001. Almost 400,000 New Yorkers received vouchers and made almost \$6 million worth of purchases with them. Nationwide nearly 2.7 million recipients made purchases totaling over \$31 million. New York ranked highest in the country in total purchases under the programs. President Bush's budget proposal eliminates all funding for both the WIC and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition programs.

"Farmers' markets are assets to their communities," Hinchey added. "They bring people together, provide an important connection with the land, and give city dwellers a sense of where their food comes from."

"These programs make it easier for farmers' markets to flourish. They also help farmers by putting 100 percent of these food dollars into their pockets. I'm going to fight to make sure they continue."

Hinchey is a member of the Agriculture Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee. Through his efforts last year, the farmers' market nutrition programs received a 25 percent increase over the previous year. Hinchey also secured \$100,000 for a pilot program that allows farmers to use wireless handheld technology to conduct electronic transactions in open-air markets.